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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, December 15, 1943

SUBJECT: "Christmas Decorations." Information from the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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When you make plans for Christmas decorations it goes without saying that you generally think of something green - holly, mistletoe, ground pine perhaps, or an evergreen tree. The custom of bringing green boughs into the house dates back many centuries. Long before the Christian Era, the Egyptians were celebrating the shortest day of the year by bringing green date palms into their houses as a symbol of life triumphant over death. When the Romans observed the feast of Saturn, they raised aloft a bough of evergreen. In Druid lore, green boughs symbolized eternal life. Although early Christian churches frowned on such pagan fancies, the ceremonial use of trees did not die. Today the Christmas tree stands for hope, life, and merriment.

In many sections of the South before the Christmas tree industry developed, the holly tree occupied tha place of honor in the living room at yuletide. The holly districts of Maryland, Delaware, and Southern New Jersey now supply most of the wreaths for the Eastern States.

Mistletoe, too, has been a Christmas symbol for hundreds of years. The ancient Druids of England used it as a holy plant in their mystic rites in the forests. Among foresters it is known as a "tree thief" because it's a parasite, taking the sap from the branch on which it grows and finally killing it. It may even cause the death of the entire tree. Certain birds are fond of mistletoe berries and as they feast on them, some of the seeds adhere to the birds' bills. When the birds visit another tree, they wipe their bills on the bark and the seeds stick to the bark where they later germinate.

But to get the Christmas trees -- those who do not have their own farm woods to draw on for Christmas trees may find fewer trees on the market this year, depending, of course, on local conditions such as manpower and transportation facilities. Canada, which ordinarily supplies the United States with a great many Christmas trees, is shipping in very few this year. A Minnesota concern specializing in processed table size forest grown trees, reports an exceptionally heavy demand this season. The tree cutting crews include women who will probably turn out as many of these table trees as went to market a year ago.

Montana, a source of many Christmas trees for the west and middle west, is reducing its shipments by about 30 percent. The Forest Service estimates that about a million and a half Douglas fir trees from western Montana national forests will be on the market this year in comparison with more than two million trees last year.

Time was when a person went to the woods and chopped down his own Christmas tree at will, but that was in the days when forest resources were considered inexhaustible. Nowadays conservationists urge care and discretion in Christmas tree cutting so as not to cause further damage to the forest. If Christmas trees are taken as a part of thinning operations, it may even leave the woods in better condition. When trees are crowded together they don't have a chance to develop properly. By thinning overcrowded stands of young trees, those remaining will have more room to grow to timber size.

California national forests are supplying many Christmas trees this season, but Forest Service men warn they are on the watch for illegal cutting. The Plumas National Forest is furnishing 10,000 trees for the holiday trade. Early in the season foresters made an inventory of the forest and as early as September, publicly advertised trees for sale. Interested dealers had an

opportunity to look over the trees in the various units advertised so they would know what they were bidding for.

In California Christmas tree cutters must obtain notarized permits from the land owner. One copy of the permit goes to the local peace officer, and one copy to the forest officer or state fire warden in the area. In addition, a shipping permit covers each load of trees transported by contractor or commercial vehicle. Such regulations protect land owners who in the past have suffered losses of trees and revenue through trespass cutting.

Another California national forest - the Tahoe - is supplying forty thousand Christmas trees this year. Here, again, regulated cutting guarantees that no area will be overcut and plenty of younger trees will be left to develop into Christmas tree size. Most of the Christmas trees cut in the Tahoe National Forest take up their abode in San Francisco homes. This year foresters are maintaining a 24-hour patrol against illegal Christmas tree cutting.

So much for what goes on behind the scenes before you select your Christmas tree in the market place. To those who ask whether, "Woodman, spare that tree," should be the watchword at Christmas time, the Forest Service answers that chopping down a tree, even a little tree, is not necessarily a sin. It all depends on the circumstances. Christmas trees and greens gladden the holiday season, and with proper cutting the woods can be left in shape to keep on growing more trees. The foresters point out that one bad forest fire might destroy more young trees than are used on a whole Christmas season.

But you don't need to throw away your tree when you are through with it. If you don't have facilities for using the trunk as firewood, you can set up your tree in the yard and you will have a bird shelter where you can operate a canteen or feeding station for the birds.

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